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MIDDLE MANAGEMENT MORALE IN THE '80s

George E. Breen

An AMA Survey Report

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ABOUT the AUTHOR

George E. Breen, now retired, is the former director of marketing research for The Stanley Works, New Britain, Connecticut. Prior to his 23-year career with that organization, he was an associate professor of marketing at Western Reserve University.

His career includes a broad spectrum of civic and professional activities. In addition to numerous magazine articles, he is co-author of *Selling in Stores* (Harper & Row), *Effective Selling* (Harper & Row), and *Do-It-Yourself Marketing Research* (McGraw-Hill). During the 1950s he organized the Connecticut Chapter of the American Marketing Association, and at various times he served on programs offered by the National Industrial Conference Board, the American Management Associations, and other organizations. His civic activities include serving as president of the board of education in Bay Village, Ohio, and as vice-chairman of the drive to build a new library in New Britain, Connecticut.

He holds a B.A. from Yale University, an M.B.A. from Harvard Graduate School of Business, and a Ph.D. from New York University.

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INTRODUCTION

Attention must be paid.

—Arthur Miller
"Death of a Salesman"

Top management is not—according to the facts and attitudes revealed in this survey—paying sufficient attention to the morale and job satisfaction of its middle managers. Some 1,550 middle managers who responded to our questionnaire bear out this judgment.

This finding is unfortunate, since middle managers are the people who, in the end, are largely responsible for keeping the wheels of industry and commerce rolling. They do not necessarily make the big decisions, but they do make a multitude of smaller decisions, each of which could help or harm their organizations. Moreover, they are the ones who must carry out those big decisions made by top management.

Far more promising, then, is our second finding: The middle managers surveyed are, over all, an optimistic group. Approximately 70 percent describe themselves as "more optimistic than three years ago" or "as optimistic as ever." An equal number look forward to one or more promotions during the upcoming decade—even though *very few* feel that top management is sincerely interested in their career advancement.

What, then, can we say about middle management morale? It may be somewhat like assessing the proverbial glass of water: Is it half empty or half full? We cannot help but conclude that morale *is* suffering. But in the face of grave misgivings about the leadership abilities of their chief executives, our middle managers are still basically sanguine.

No one will challenge the fact that even the most fortunate corporations house their disenchanted and pessimistic factions. All companies support a range of performers at every level—the excellent, the satisfactory, and those who just get by. It's a fact of corporate life. Organizations have simply learned to live with it, it seems.

But just to disregard managers who feel dissatisfied with their jobs and lack hope for the future is both impractical and impossible. There are far too many for that, and the cost is too high. This study clearly shows that if organizations want the best from their people, at all levels, they have to make a stronger effort to revitalize their middle management group.

This pulling together of the middle management ranks will be especially crucial during the rest of the eighties, when questions of work and product quality, of profit and costs, appear so much more important than in the heady days of the fifties, sixties, and seventies.

Before proceeding, we would do well to define what we mean by "morale." *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* gives this definition: "The mental and emotional attitudes of an individual to the function or task expected of him by his group and loyalty to it; a sense of common purpose with respect to a group: esprit de corps." We may also describe it as that state of mind that leads to the most productive performance on the job. It includes personal satisfaction based on realistic appraisals of the past, of the present, and of the prospects for the future. It means the opportunity to achieve and maintain a happy home life.

Or, slicing the cake another way, good morale consists of three elements—optimism, satisfaction with relationships with superiors, peers, and subordinates, and overall feelings of success. Our questionnaire was designed to measure these three elements.

A key concept is "satisfaction based on realistic appraisals." It was clear that the greatest number of those answering our questionnaire knew that at some rung on the promotional and salary ladder their careers would cease to advance. Good morale does not necessarily imply any reasonable hope of moving into a top management slot. Middle managers want *more* than that.

Here are some of the facts and attitudes you will find in this report:

- . . . real differences in outlook and thinking between men and women managers.
- . . . middle management confidence, or lack of it, in the ability of top management to cope with future business problems.
- . . . what middle management thinks should be done to improve its work satisfaction and performance on the job.
- . . . the great importance middle management attaches to better communication with top management.
- . . . the great emphasis middle management places on "respect" from top management.
- . . . age brackets where middle management morale appears to begin declining.
- . . . middle management hope, or lack of it, for the future.
- . . . differences in morale and feelings of success among persons educated in several sections of the country.
- . . . differences in morale and feelings of success among persons working for organizations based in several regions of the country.
- . . . courses of study that middle managers feel were of greatest help in their later careers and courses considered least valuable.
- . . . sizes and locations of universities that graduated students who now have the greatest job satisfaction.

Where the facts warrant, this report will make suggestions for actions that may help improve morale among middle managers. As you will see, great improvement is possible. Perhaps top performers are doing fine, but many of the rest of this middle group need greater understanding and help.

HOW THE STUDY WAS DONE

Questionnaires were mailed to 5,000 AMA members whose records indicated that they would fit into the category of middle managers. The list of potential respondents was developed to provide a representative sampling of company sizes, industries, and geographical regions. Inspection of the returns indicated that this overall representation had been achieved.

A total of 1,557 questionnaires were completed and returned, a response rate of 31 percent. Such a high rate of return for this kind of questionnaire study is significant and gives assurance about the validity of the findings. Twenty-one questionnaires were eliminated, either because respondents did not complete questions regarded as essential for the analysis,

or because the questionnaires arrived after the returns had gone to the computer.

We thought it would be effective to divide the questionnaire into three major sections: the past, the present, and the future. Most of us occasionally look back and wonder about the usefulness of our preparation for present and future jobs. We look at the present and wonder how we are doing compared with what we had hoped for and with how others are doing. We look at the future and wonder what it will bring. Middle managers are no different, of course. The high rate of return suggests that the respondents welcomed the chance for such an examination of themselves and their careers.

HIGHLIGHTS and CONCLUSIONS

Collectively, the middle managers in our survey cast a strong vote of "no confidence" in their current corporate leadership, both in its ability to guide their organizations through the troubled eighties and in its efforts to prepare them for individual career advancement. These findings may indeed startle top managers, who also score well below par on their basic "honesty and straightforwardness." In fact, only 33 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, "Middle managers in my organization respect the honesty and straightforwardness of top management." Furthermore, only 11 percent strongly agreed (a rating of 5 on the agreement/disagreement scale).

We anticipated that managers might complain about their salaries, or their working conditions, or their promotional opportunities. But the unexpectedly low assessment middle managers give to the leadership abilities of their corporate heads signals a lack of faith and a pervasive disaffection that can mean only that among middle managers—or at least among a significant segment—morale is low.

Obviously, most top managers *are* honest and straightforward. But somehow this truth has not trickled down to many in the lower ranks.

On the more hopeful side, however, we can characterize the typical middle manager as a perennial optimist. The appropriate rejoinder (sarcastic, but still sanguine) might be, "You've *got* to be an optimist." This kind of fortitude gives corporate heads a lot to work with.

Consider the following highlights within the framework of the key components of morale outlined in the introduction. (For the moment, we will confine ourselves to those important findings that can lead to a change of attitude or to action on the part of business organizations.) The body of the report will present these findings in greater detail as well as additional discoveries.

On overall feelings of success . . .

- Eighty-five percent of the middle managers answered "yes" to the question, "Do you feel that you are successful in your career, considering your age." In other words, four out of five have overall feelings of success.
- Asked to rate a number of items that might be considered "indicators of success," respondents indicated that a high degree of decision-making responsibility was primary. Achievement of lifetime goals came out as the second most important criterion. In the light of this, consider our next finding . . .

- The greatest discrepancies between managers' ratings of "indicators of success" and their ratings of their own individual achievement come in the same two areas—decision-making authority and fulfillment of lifetime goals. In other words, most middle managers see themselves as falling far short of the mark in those areas that matter most in judging success.
- The highest scores for achieved success were given to "respect from superiors, peers, and subordinates." "Opportunity to achieve and maintain a happy home life" ranked second.

On optimism and hope for the future . . .

- Seventy percent of the middle managers surveyed reported that they were either "as optimisitc as ever" or "more optimistic than three years ago."
- However, only 18 percent of the middle managers questioned (less than one in five) have full confidence in their top managements' ability to lead their organizations in the decade ahead.
- Only 15 percent (less than one in six) fuliy agree that cooperation and communication between top and middle management will remain the same or improve during the 1980s. More than half feel it will decline.

On satisfaction with relationships ("esprit de corps") . . .

- Asked to indicate how various new programs and policies would improve morale and job satisfaction, the respondents gave the highest ratings to those programs involving better communication and more participation in decision making. These findings are clearly reinforced by answers to other questions. "Tell us, in your own words, what you would like to see happen in your organization that would help you to do a better, more satisfying, more productive job." "Better communication—especially with upper management" was voiced most often.
- As stated previously, managers rate as their highest achieved success "respect from peers, subordinates, and superiors." Respondents may, however, have been thinking more about their peer and subordinate relationships than about their dealings with upper management. Over 70 percent, for example, agreed with the statement, "I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my subordinates," while approximately 50 percent agreed with a parallel statement about upper management relationships.
- Both men and women report that the two factors contributing most to job satisfaction are "a job allowing me to use my best skills" and "my organization's ethical standards."
- The women managers among the middle ranks appear to be far more responsive than the men to a wide range of policies and programs that might elevate morale. The women gave significantly higher ratings to "a pay scale comparable to that of other organizations in the industry," "better communication with immediate supervisors," "a more complete and accurate information network," "greater opportunity to participate in seminars designed to improve technical and management skills," and "an effective performance appraisal system." They are somewhat less interested, however, in participative management and profit-sharing programs.

Taken together, these findings indicate that middle managers are *reachers*. They want better communication, increased participation, more decision-making responsibility, and opportunity to use their best skills. Clearly, this group is ready, willing, and able to do more.

1

THE PRESENT

The future is purchased by the present.

—Samuel Johnson

We began by asking a teaser to start respondents thinking about themselves. We posed the question, "Do you feel that you are successful in your career, considering your age?" Yes or no?

Actually, a "yes-no" response reveals very little in the way of in-depth understanding. Everyone's feelings of success rest on a variety of concerns. Some are tangible, such as salary; some are intangible, such as a happy home life.

Nevertheless, what could be more basic? A person who answers "yes" to a question like this is much more likely to be happy and productive in his or her work. Indeed, 1,302 respondents (84.8 percent) did answer "yes"; 175 (11.4 percent) answered "no," and 59 (3.8 percent) did not answer.

But even though the majority of managers "feel successful," something has clearly gone wrong—as answers to other questions in this section reveal. Apparently, all the books written about management practices and all of the graduate business programs, seminars, and workshops have not yet been sufficiently successful in teaching upper and middle managers how to develop productive and trusting relationships with each other.

First, let's take a careful look at what managers mean when they say they do (or do not) feel successful. Then, let's examine how other aspects of the workplace affect morale—decision-making responsibility, office politics, communication networks, management by objectives (MBO) programs, relationships with co-workers, and the like.

HOPED-FOR SUCCESS . . . AND REALITY

We asked respondents to look at some items that might be considered "indicators of success" and to rate each indicator from 1 (low importance) to 5 (high importance). Then, we asked respondents to use the same 1-to-5 scale to indicate what success they had actually achieved in each area.

HIGHLIGHTS–THE PRESENT

- Four out of five respondents surveyed said that they felt successful. But this reported euphoria was tempered by answers to later questions focusing more precisely on how success is measured.
- What does "success" mean to middle managers? Surprisingly, matters of salary, position, and promotion are not important yardsticks. According to our survey, most managers measure their success by how much decision-making responsibility they have. The achievement of lifetime goals and respect from co-workers are also key criteria. Fetching up next-to-last place in importance is "the opportunity for significant community activity."
- In two of the areas that contribute most to "feeling successful" (decision-making responsibility and achievement of personal life goals), managers feel the highest degrees of frustration.
- Middle managers give shockingly low scores to the honesty and straightforwardness of top management, and they tend to feel that upper management is not sincerely interested in their welfare. They rate lowest of all their agreement with the statement, "My organization is doing an adequate job of preparing me for advancement."
- What conditions (both inside and outside the organization) have the greatest impact on morale? Surprisingly, the company's commitment to ethical standards ranks next to the top in terms of influence on morale. The firm's profitability and office politics also carry a great deal of weight. But the greatest impact on morale, quite simply, is "a job that allows me to use my best skills."
- What new policies and programs have the greatest potential for boosting morale? Again, changes in wage structure and promotional opportunities are relatively unimportant when compared with programs that would improve the quality of communication and encourage more participation.

Again, we see the relatively greater importance attached to the intangibles–decision-making authority, respect, achievement of lifetime goals–over such matters as salaries and promotions (see Exhibit 1.1). This is not to say that salaries and promotions are unimportant. But for these respondents, dissatisfaction comes in other aspects of the job. And it's quite clear that any organization that wishes to raise morale among middle managers must do more than pay them good salaries.

The largest *discrepancies* between "success indicators" and "actual achievement" are in "high degree of decision-making responsibility" and "achievement of lifetime goals." The gap is much smaller in matters of salary, promotions, and opportunities for an affluent lifestyle. And the respondents gave themselves the *highest* "actual achievement" scores in the area of "respect from supervisors, peers, and subordinates."

In other words, in two of the three areas that "matter most" in measuring success, our respondents feel the greatest frustration. Overall, these findings are mildly ironic: On the one hand, the respondents seem to feel that they have earned the respect of their supervisors and subordinates. On the other hand, they seem to lack the autonomy to make decisions and assume responsibility–a quality that would seem to flow naturally from a workplace in which managers at different levels respect each other. Apparently, in many organizations, it doesn't work that way.

One other inescapable conclusion emerges. Something should be done, if possible, to resolve the discrepancy between desire for achievement of personal life goals and perceived success in this area. Perhaps the Japanese have begun to show us that employers can be more effective in closing the gap between hope and reality in the lives of their employees. Achievement of per-

Exhibit 1.1. How managers measure their success.

Respondents used a 1-to-5 scale to rate the following success indicators in terms of both importance and actual achievement. The table presents mean scores.

Indicators of success	*Importance in definition of success*	*Respondents' actual success*	*Differentials*
High degree of decision-making responsibility	4.45	3.58	.87
Respect from superiors, peers, and subordinates	4.32	3.98	.34
Achievement of personal life goals	4.24	3.35	.89
Opportunity and means for achieving a fulfilling, happy home and social life	4.13	3.59	.54
Feeling of financial security	3.98	3.43	.55
Changes in company or department resulting from my ideas	3.91	3.52	.39
Salary	3.86	3.47	.39
Regular promotions	3.61	3.47	.14
Opportunity for significant community activity	2.72	2.62	.10
Lifestyle indicative of affluence	2.67	2.96	.29

sonal life goals cannot be divorced from job satisfaction.

Also, as answers to these first two questions reveal, age clearly makes a difference: The older the respondent, the greater the tendency to admit, "I am not successful, considering my age." Only 70 percent of the respondents in the 51-55 group answered "yes" to the first question on success. And even fewer (65 percent) of those in the 61-65 group said they felt successful.

This trend warrants concern by upper management. Older persons are often those with the most responsible jobs. And the combination of more responsibility and less happiness can tear at the fabric of company morale.

Can top managers do anything to help older employees feel more successful? Perhaps, within reason, they can. Managers of all ages say that feeling successful stems, first, from adequate decision-making responsibility, and second, from achievement of personal lifetime goals. Other secondary yardsticks for success change over time, however. The point is that a simple understanding of what older managers mean when they say they do (or do not) feel successful may provide the first step toward a solution. More on this in Chapter 4.

INFLUENCING MORALE

We asked respondents to assume that their organizations were to introduce the programs and policies listed in Exhibit 1.2. The participants then indicated to what extent each would improve their morale and sense of work satisfaction.

Two themes emerge clearly from this data: *communication* and *participation*. Moreover, these concepts will surface repeatedly in our examination of answers to other questions—unmistakable guideposts to what top managers need to do to boost morale.

"A more complete and accurate information network among supervisors and subordinates" seems to have the greatest leverage. This idea is echoed in "better communication with supervisors," a concept that tied for the third-place slot, equal in importance to "more effective performance appraisal." The idea of participation occurs repeatedly among the top six choices: participative management as such, as well as participation in seminars and in gainsharing or profit-sharing plans.

Note that this is the only data suggesting that financial matters (gainsharing and profit sharing) influence morale in any significant way. Although these respondents seem quite content with their salaries, they would welcome financial incentives tied to their contributions. Unfortunately, for many organizations, a profit-sharing program for middle management is not a very practical idea. And gainsharing programs work best in factory settings, where production output can be measured easily.

In almost every category, female managers rate the item in question much higher than do the men. Only on the issues of participative management and profit sharing do the women give lower ratings. Is it possible that the women do not feel comfortable with the thought of participative management, perhaps because they are outnumbered and, consequently, insecure?

Note the exceptionally large differences between the men and the women on three other items: (1) an effective performance appraisal system, (2) better communication with supervisors, and (3) a more complete and accurate information network. The women in our sample clearly see these areas as having greater influence on morale than do the men. Top managers, wishing to bring good female managers into positions of greater responsibility, might do well to take stock of how attitudes and practices in their organizations may be shortchanging women in these areas.

We asked respondents to indicate the extent to which various conditions (both inside and outside the organization) influenced morale and job satisfaction. The concepts presented are listed in Exhibit 1.3.

Respondents clearly see "a job allowing me to use my best skills" as having the greatest influence on morale. Almost 70 percent rated this criterion as a "5" in importance. "The organization's commitment to ethical standards" emerged, surprisingly, as the second greatest influence. "Company profitability" was also an important factor, as was the "political climate" in the office.

Here, unlike the pictures emerging from answers to previous questions, there is a clear trend in most items by age bracket. This information should help top managers and older managers understand younger managers, and vice versa.

The older middle managers get, the more their work is affected by their companies' profitability. This also holds true for their companies' commitments to ethical standards. Global political climate and strife among nations do not appear to be significant factors. But the U.S.

Exhibit 1.2. What if your organization instituted the following programs or policies . . .?

We asked our managers how much these new policies and programs would boost their morale and improve job satisfaction. The exhibit shows the percentages saying that the item would help very much.

New programs	*Total*	*Male managers*	*Female managers*
A more complete and accurate information network among supervisors and subordinates	31.1	28.5	45.1
A profit-sharing or gainsharing program in which you would participate	27.2	27.2	21.5
An effective performance appraisal system	27.0	25.5	35.0
Better communication with supervisors	27.0	24.9	35.9
More extensive participative management at all levels of the organization	24.7	25.1	23.6
Greater opportunity/encouragement to participate in seminars designed to upgrade management or technical skills	24.3	22.5	33.8
A pay scale comparable to those of other organizations in the industry	20.4	20.0	24.1
A rating system for determining job grades and salary levels, along with adequate communication on how the system works	18.2	16.5	24.5
Greater opportunity/encouragement to participate in seminars related to personal skill development (T-groups, leadership skills, etc.)	17.9	16.5	24.1

economic climate and confidence in the U.S. government increasingly impinge on morale and job satisfaction as managers grow older.

One of the more interesting, useful, and usable findings is the very large difference between men and women in these categories. Women seem not to be so sensitive as men to their companies' profitability. Moreover, the U.S. economic climate and confidence in the government do not affect the morale of women managers as much. But matters closer to home—their companies' ethical standards, the political climate, time for personal and family interests,

Exhibit 1.3. What conditions make the managerial barometer rise or fall?

We asked managers how much the following factors influence their morale and job satisfaction. The figures represent the percentage who rated them as a 5 on the 1-to-5 scale.

	Age									
	25-30	*31-35*	*36-40*	*41-45*	*46-50*	*51-55*	*56-60*	*61-65*	*M*	*F*
Your company's profitability	24.5	23.1	29.7	31.9	37.6	38.8	45.3	52.2	32.3	22.8
Political climate in office	31.1	27.1	29.4	29.2	26.3	32.6	30.7	30.4	26.8	32.7
Your organization's commitment to ethical standards	31.1	34.5	37.1	36.2	47.3	53.5	60.0	73.9	37.9	47.3
Personal problems	4.6	8.3	5.9	6.2	4.8	8.5	10.7	4.3	7.5	4.6
Enough time for family/ personal interests	15.2	22.8	17.9	19.1	17.2	17.1	21.3	17.4	19.6	37.9
Global political climate, strife among nations	1.3	0.6	1.5	3.1	1.6	6.2	2.7	8.7	1.7	3.4
U.S. economic climate	13.2	9.1	14.4	19.1	22.0	23.3	33.3	30.4	17.3	15.2
Confidence in U.S. government	6.0	4.0	8.5	15.2	16.7	17.1	18.7	21.7	11.7	8.9
Job allowing you to use your best skills	70.9	67.5	69.4	73.2	73.7	76.0	77.3	87.0	68.9	84.8

and opportunity to use their best skills–seem to have a comparatively stronger impact on morale.

This last area–opportunity to use their best skills–is especially crucial to the women.

The answers to this and the immediately preceding question appear to define women managers as being more in need of help and perhaps less secure in their jobs. Their interests seem to be more closely tied to their jobs than are men's.

We asked respondents to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about workplace relationships. See Exhibit 1.4.

Take a careful look at the data in this exhibit.

The answers to two questions—confidence in top management's ability to meet current challenges and faith in the honesty and straightforwardness of top management—are cause for great concern. Only 33 percent of the respondents felt that top managers were honest and straightforward, and the overall average on the 5-point agreement/disagreement scale comes out at 2.97.

Moreover, middle managers feel far more comfortable in relationships with their subordinates than in relationships with their bosses. Furthermore, most of the respondents (over 80 percent) indicated that they consulted with subordinates in decisions affecting the subordinates' work. Far fewer indicated that upper management, in turn, consulted middle managers in decisions affecting their work.

One interesting, if somewhat puzzling, finding emerged from the cross-tabulations with educational background. Graduates from large state universities appear to have somewhat more comfortable relationships with upper management than do graduates of large private universities. The graduates from state schools were more likely to agree with three statements: (1) "In my organization, top management is sincerely interested in middle managers," (2) "I have a great deal of confidence in management's ability to meet the challenges currently facing my organization," and (3) "My organization is doing an adequate job of preparing me for advancement." Once again, see Exhibit 1.4.

We asked: "Is there a program of management by objectives (MBO) in your organization? If so, do you believe that the program is sincerely supported by top management?"

If middle managers are dissatisfied, either with their jobs or with their relationships with top management, MBO might possibly be a step toward correcting these problems. This, at least, was the logic behind the question. The results suggest that the logic may well have been valid. See Exhibit 1.5.

Forty-three percent of the respondents said there was an MBO program in their organiza-

NONMANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS

Answers from respondents classifying themselves as "nonmanagement professionals" give cause for concern. Indeed, this group was relatively small and far from homogeneous. R&D professionals, data processing personnel, accountants, and the like. But the consistency of their answers throughout the questionnaire indicates that top management should focus attention on the morale of this group. Consider two findings:

- Only 76 percent of these respondents said they considered themselves successful (compared with 85 percent for the overall sample).
- Different factors influence the morale of this group. These individuals are much less likely than other respondents to allow company profitability to impinge on morale and job satisfaction. They allow the global political climate to affect morale about twice as often as do supervisory managers, and they are much more sensitive to the U.S. economic climate than are the others. However, the nonmanagement professionals did not indicate that "a job that allows me to use my best skills" was a morale-related factor. Perhaps these respondents are already confident of having such jobs.

Exhibit 1.4. Group dynamics at the workplace.

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with workplace relationships. They used a 1-to-5 scale to indicate agreement/disagreement with these statements. Higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement.

	Mean scores
I usually consult with my subordinates in decisions that affect their work.	4.21
I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my subordinates.	3.86
I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my peers.	3.70
Upper management welcomes my participation in decisions affecting my work.	3.63
I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my superiors.	3.41
I have a great deal of confidence in upper management's ability to meet the challenges facing my organization.	3.04
Middle managers in my organization respect the honesty and straightforwardness of top management.	2.97
In my organization upper management is sincerely interested in middle management personnel.	2.95
My organization is doing an adequate job of preparing me for advancement.	2.77

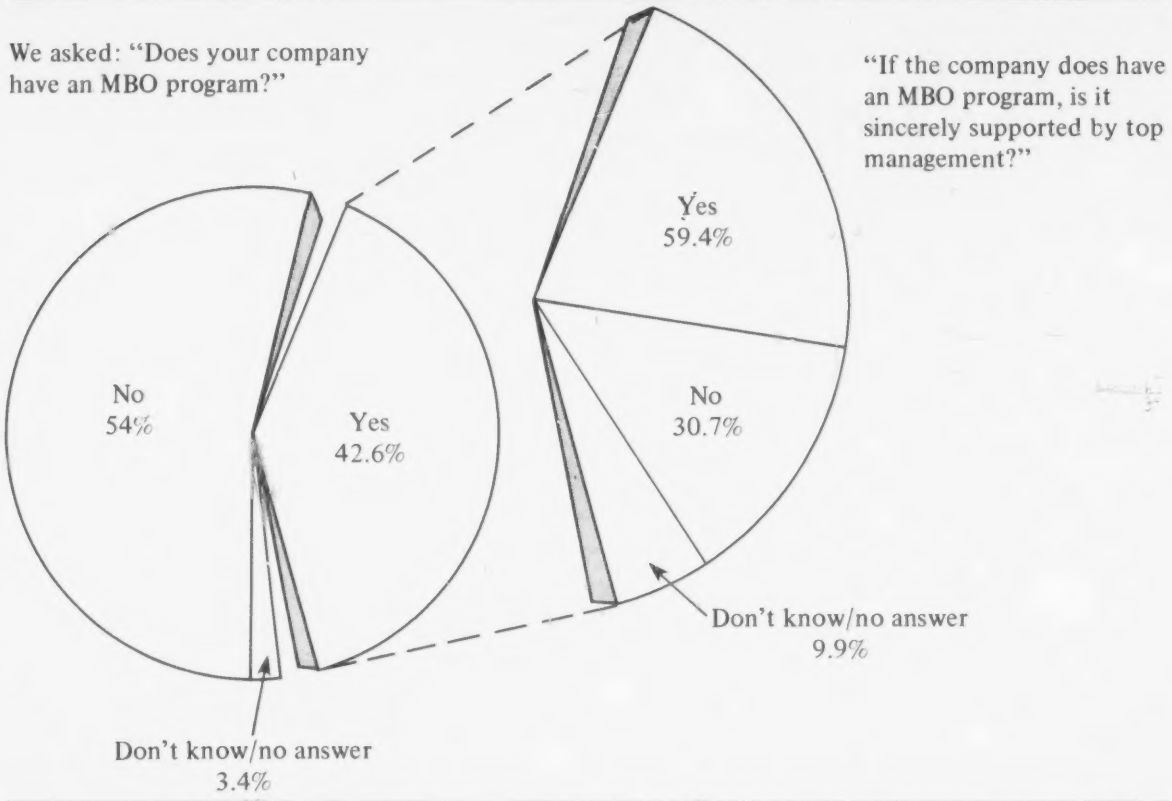
Graduates of large state universities differed from graduates of private schools on these statements. (This portion of the exhibit shows the percentage of respondents "strongly agreeing" with each statement.)

	Large private schools	*Large state schools*
I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my subordinates.	24.1%	20.6%
I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my peers.	15.5	36.7
In my organization top management is sincerely interested in middle managers.	9.1	20.4
I have a great deal of confidence in upper management's ability to meet the challenges currently facing my organization.	10.7	14.8
My organization is doing an adequate job of preparing me for advancement.	4.3	8.2

tions. Of these, 60 percent believed that the program was sincerely supported by top management. In other words, only 389 respondents out of the total 1,536 said that they were working in companies where an MBO program was in operation and sincerely supported.

These 389 respondents also showed remark-

Exhibit 1.5. Is MBO (management by objectives) alive and well?


We asked: "Does your company have an MBO program?"
No 54%
Yes 42.6%
Don't know/no answer 3.4%
"If the company does have an MBO program, is it sincerely supported by top management?"
Yes 59.4%
No 30.7%
Don't know/no answer 9.9%

ably higher levels of morale: more optimism about the future and greater satisfaction in relationships with peers, subordinates, and superiors. Moreover, these respondents simply feel more successful. In fact, 60 percent fell into the classification of "highly successful": respondents with few or no gaps between their ratings of "success indicators" and their assessments of "actual achievement." (Overall, only 32 percent of the respondents revealed a similar success indicator/actual achievement profile.)

One might conclude, then, that these 389 respondents are about twice as likely as other respondents to achieve those goals that matter most in their careers. But approach correlations such as this carefully. True, MBO and "feeling successful" clearly go together. But this in no way proves that the one causes the other. Still, for these 389 participants, MBO may have been a step in the right direction.

We asked: "Does your organization have a fast track for training and promoting persons who seem to have a great deal of talent? If so, are you on the fast track?"

Many managers in large- and middle-sized organizations have seen relatively young persons moving ahead faster than others. The young person suddenly becomes "boss," and those who get passed by in the race may wonder, "Why that person—and not me?"

Roughly 17 percent of the total respondents said that they were part of a "fast track." These

Exhibit 1.6. Is civic activity a corporate virtue?

We asked respondents . . .

how many hours per month they spent in civic activities

and whether participation in these activities helped persons in their organizations get ahead.

respondents reveal predictably high feelings of success: 98 percent answered "yes" to the question, "Are you successful in your career, considering your age?" Roughly 13 percent of the respondents said that they were not on the fast track, even though such programs were in operation in their companies. Of these respondents, only 76 percent answered "yes" to the question, "Are you successful . . .?" (Recall that, over all, 85 percent of the respondents said that they felt successful.)

Morale would no doubt be higher if every middle manager were convinced that each member of the organization had an equal opportunity for advancement.

We asked: "All things considered, do you believe that you are now receiving a fair wage?"

We found earlier that salary is not a key issue influencing morale and feelings of success, and the answers to this question reinforce that finding. Seventy-four percent of these respondents said that they were receiving a fair wage. Little difference was found among age groups. Also, 74.6 percent of the men reported getting a fair wage, as against 70.9 percent of the women. Although this gap is not large, it does point to a difference between the sexes.

We asked: "About how many hours a month (on the average) do you spend in civic activities (hospital boards, museum committees, youth clubs, PTAs, and the like)? Does participation in these activities help people in your organization get ahead?"

At one time, many middle managers assumed that visible efforts on behalf of the community would bring rich rewards from impressed employers. This assumption, apparently, is no longer valid. Figures presented earlier revealed that respondents did not rate "opportunity for

significant community activity" as a very important indicator of success. In fact, as Exhibit 1.6 shows, the majority reported that community work claims less than five hours of their time per month. Nor is this involvement of any great importance to the employers. Eighty-four percent of the respondents reported that community activity does not help career advancement, in their opinion.

As might be expected, older managers tend to spend more time in civic activities than do younger managers. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents over 55 claim to spend more than ten hours a month in civic work. The importance of this activity as a success indicator also grows. Perhaps as older managers lose confidence in their continued progress in their companies, they attach greater significance to involvement in outside activities.

WHAT DOES IT ALL ADD UP TO?

More work needs to be done by top management to make middle managers feel the respect and decision-making authority they clearly crave, to open up channels leading to greater participation and communication, and to win back respect for corporate leadership. Also, more attention should be directed at helping women managers feel more secure and more a part of their organizations. These things are not impossible to accomplish—once top management recognizes the psychological needs of its middle management group.

2

THE PAST

A sensible man judges of present on past events.

—Sophocles

Where we are depends a lot on where we have been. At the least, examination of the past gives an indication of the external forces and events that have combined with individual internal factors to shape the present.

That, of course, includes managers and their careers. In a sense, we designed our survey to prompt a kind of self-exploration by middle managers. By stimulating our respondents to highlight for themselves the personal qualities and career experiences that have contributed to their career development, we hoped they would gain a greater sense of their own "job identities" and, by extension, their own personal identities.

We asked which undergraduate courses were most valuable in preparing middle manager respondents for their careers.

As noted in the highlights of this section, the top three areas of study were business, mathematics, and literature and composition. At the bottom of the list were music and art, engineering, and education. The high ranking given to literature and composition contradicts the stereotype of the typical corporate animal and indicates that education in the humanities plays a significant part in the preparation of today's managers. English teachers take note!

We asked which courses in graduate school were most valuable in preparing the managers for their careers.

Courses in business management, banking, finance, economics, and accounting turned out to be most valuable, in the eyes of the respondents. See Exhibit 2.1. Rather unexpectedly, these rankings remain about even across the age groups. In other words, the older management groups feel about the same as the younger ones.

Not only did computer and information courses rank low on the list of valuable courses, but so did marketing. Marketing courses, along with computer and information subjects, are highly important areas of study. We can assume, then, that a low position on the list does not imply that a course "lacks value." On the contrary, it may offer highly useful knowledge. In light of this, our present findings may serve as an indication to school administrators that the standard curriculums for these courses and others with low rankings need to be strengthened.

We asked: "When you accepted your present position, did you have a personal promotional timetable in mind—being "paid your age" ($30,000 at age 30, $40,000 at age 40, for example), or becoming a vice-president by age 50? See Exhibit 2.2.

HIGHLIGHTS–THE PAST

- With the computer revolution in full force and the consequent marketability of high-tech expertise, it was startling to discover that computer and information systems courses taught at the college level ranked relatively low on the list of "most valuable courses."
- Job hopping, particularly in the younger age brackets, may signal a new wave in the art of "getting ahead." "Climbing the ladder" may now mean moving from job to job in an effort to advance. It may indicate career strategy, rather than career instability.
- Another new wave, the "personal timetable" for advancement, seems to be gaining momentum. Almost 60 percent of younger managers had what may be called a personal timetable. They expected to be at a certain level of management and salary by a certain number of years after graduation.
- The three courses selected as most valuable are remarkable in their diversity: business, mathematics, and literature and composition. What these three courses have in common is that they require an analytical approach. They are courses that teach students "how to think."

A slightly greater number of those who attended state universities had personal timetables but were less "on schedule" than students from private schools. The differences are not great, however, and may reflect what students were taught in the various institutions or the prevailing modes of thought on different campuses.

The idea of a personal timetable seems to be a creation of recent years. Over three out of four recent graduates say that their timetables are "on schedule." Of those who had such timetables, two-thirds of the recent graduates call them realistic. As might be expected, the percentage of those calling the timetables realistic decreases in older brackets. And also, the percentage of those who say their careers are on schedule drops sharply with advancing years. It is in these age brackets, as pointed out earlier, that we find men and women with the most responsible jobs: disappointment and disillusion here may seriously affect morale and productivity. Greater authority to make decisions and opportunity to contribute ideas may help improve the morale of this age group.

From the sum of our data we uncovered an interesting feature related to younger managers–their high level of ambition and their achievement orientation. They are a group determined to "go for it," with exacting personal career goals and what we see as resourcefulness and a strong desire to get ahead. These two conclusions are supported by our findings that the majority of managers between the ages of 25 and 35 have personal timetables, and that there is a high degree of job change among this group. Some of the findings our data reveal include the following:

- Eighty-one percent of all middle managers have worked for more than one employer. Even 70.9 percent of the 25-30 year olds have already worked for more than their present employer.
- The number of managers who have worked for just one employer remains fairly constant over the age brackets, except in the case of the most recent graduates, many of whom have already made one move.
- Job movement by those who call themselves "successful" has been just about the same as for those who think of themselves as having low success. Movement from job to job may be more a function of the economic times than of feelings of success.

Exhibit 2.3 reports the number of employers worked for according to age bracket.

Exhibit 2.1. A look at the graduate school business curriculum.

Respondents who had received graduate degrees were asked to indicate the three courses in graduate school that proved "most valuable" to them in their careers. They chose the following (figures indicate percentage of respondents who selected the course).

Business management	42.3
Banking, finance, economics	19.8
Accounting	19.5
Personnel management	16.9
Statistics	16.2
Communications	14.5
Marketing, selling	13.3
Computer and information systems	12.2
Labor and industrial relations	9.8
Physical sciences	7.4
Law	6.1
International business	2.1
Purchasing	1.5
Insurance	1.4
Advertising, advertising management	1.4
Real estate	0.3

Exhibit 2.2. Does setting a schedule get you there on time?

	Total	*25-30*	*31-35*	*36-40*	*41-45*	*46-50*	*51-55*	*56-60*	*61-65*
First (A) we asked respondents if they had devised a personal promotional timetable when they set out on their careers (figures represent percentage of entire group of respondents).									
Yes, I had one	47.7	57.6	59.3	51.8	46.3	36.0	33.3	24.0	30.4
No, I did not	51.0	40.4	40.7	47.9	51.8	60.8	65.1	73.3	69.6
No answer	1.3	2.0		0.3	1.9	3.2	1.6	2.7	
Second (B), we questioned whether they felt their timetables were realistic (figures represent percentage of entire group of respondents).									
Yes	53.8	66.2	61.8	55.9	55.6	44.1	41.1	29.3	30.4
No	40.0	28.5	35.3	39.4	37.4	45.2	51.2	57.3	56.5
No answer	6.2	5.3	2.9	4.7	7.0	10.7	7.7	13.4	13.1
And last (C), we wondered whether those who had set timetables had stuck to them (were they on schedule)?									
Yes	71.2	81.6	75.0	74.4	67.2	61.2	51.2	55.6	57.1
No	28.1	17.2	25.0	25.0	31.1	37.3	48.8	44.4	42.9
No answer	0.7	1.1		0.6	1.7	1.5			

Exhibit 2.3. Job hopping: Are today's young managers foot-loose, or do they just march to a different drum?

	(Percentage of total respondents by age)								
Number of employers	*Total*	*25-30*	*31-35*	*36-40*	*41-45*	*46-50*	*51-55*	*56-60*	*61-65*
1	18.5	29.1	16.8	18.3	18.2	17.2	13.2	21.3	17.4
2	25.6	37.1	32.8	24.7	20.2	16.1	19.4	30.7	8.7
3	21.8	17.9	22.5	23.5	21.8	21.5	25.6	16.0	17.4
4	14.8	8.6	16.0	14.4	16.7	16.7	10.1	13.3	34.8
5	9.2	3.3	6.3	10.3	9.3	12.4	17.1	4.0	8.7
More than 5	7.7	2.0	5.1	7.5	10.1	10.8	10.9	10.7	13.0
No answer	2.4	2.0	0.6	1.5	3.5	5.4	3.9	4.0	

Despite our conclusion that job hopping, although traditionally regarded as a negative factor, may indicate resourcefulness and ambition, the reality is that high turnover is costly and many companies want to encourage loyalty. Strong efforts to retain a consistent core of dedicated employees can produce great benefits in terms of corporate morale and overall effectiveness.

The data also yielded the following facts on middle managers:

Middle managers are a well-educated group. Eighty-two percent of those surveyed had a bachelor's degree or better. Thirty-seven and a half percent had a master's degree or better. Almost 6 percent had doctoral degrees. See Exhibit 2.4 for data on education. It seems that sheepskin diplomacy pays off.

The Midwest has educated almost a third of both those with graduate degrees and with undergraduate degrees. Almost one out of four managers did their undergraduate work in the Northeast. The same percentage held true for those who had done graduate work.

Forty-five percent attended private universities. Forty-nine percent attended state universities (overwhelmingly the large ones). The remainder did not answer. The trend over the years has been consistently in favor of the state universities (again, almost entirely the large ones). Only in the 25-30 age bracket was there an apparent move back to private universities. We cannot explain this in light of the steady trend in other age brackets toward state schools.

Exhibit 2.4. The middle managers who responded to this survey are a well-educated group.

	(Percent of total respondents)		
Highest level of education	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*
High school	2.0	1.2	5.9
Some college	14.8	13.4	24.1
Bachelor's degree	24.2	24.3	19.8
Some graduate work	21.2	21.7	19.8
Master's degree	31.8	32.7	26.2
Doctoral degree	5.7	6.2	0.4
No answer	0.4	0.5	0.4

3

THE FUTURE

The future is a world limited by ourselves.

—Maurice Maetterlink

Part of the impotence middle managers feel stems from their inability to "reach" top management. The concept of communication, both in personal relations and on a larger scale, has received a great deal of attention in recent years. What sociologists and psychologists stress is that communicating means "relating," "dialogue," "connection."

This high quality of communication, our respondents seem to be saying, is critical to productive and satisfying work relationships. Unfortunately, it is not something that they now have. Nor is it likely to develop within the next five years, say the respondents.

In the final section of our questionnaire, we asked respondents to use their own words to answer this question: "What would you like to see happen in your organization that would aid you in doing a better, more productive, more satisfying job?" And we followed up with an even more pointed question: "Do you expect that this change will occur within the next five years?"

Well over half of the 792 persons who took the trouble to give us their ideas called for better communication all around and—in particular—with top management. Add to these the numbers who voiced a need for more participative management, greater understanding and respect from top management, and changes in top management, and another picture of the failing relationships between middle and top management comes clearly into focus. See Exhibit 3.1.

The following responses are typical—and telling:

> I'd like to see a transition from tight central autocratic control to a participative style that would improve the climate of trust among management and union employees alike. A much-needed result might be enhancement of management's credibility.
>
> Male, age 36-40
> Computer manufacturing

> Top management needs to be less political and factional. It would help if our top executives would try to be more cooperative and better team players.
>
> Male, age 36-40
> Medical/health care

> The following improvements would help: (1) Top management stabilization, (2) reduction in politics, (3) better utilization of talents so that we can get work done, improve finances, and grow.
>
> Male, age 40-45
> Consulting engineer

HIGHLIGHTS—THE FUTURE

- What one improvement in the workplace would contribute most to productivity and morale? "Better communications throughout the organization, and with upper management in particular," say over half of the respondents, representing all ages and salary levels. Most respondents, however, are not hopeful that this improvement will be made.
- Less than one in five managers have full confidence that top management will provide adequate leadership during the coming decade.
- Thirty-six percent of the male managers would accept a move to another city for a promotion. But only 22 percent of the females would. And the women managers do not feel, for the most part, that their families would support such a move.
- Half of the managers expect their salaries to remain even with inflation or to fall behind inflation if they remain in their current jobs during the 1980s. Almost 70 percent, however, expect one or more promotions during the next ten years.
- Over all, then, optimism about the future is mixed, but pointing toward the positive. This is especially true for the women managers: 35 percent of the female respondents classified themselves as "more optimistic than three years ago," compared with 27 percent of the men.

> Practice what is preached (QWL, and the like).
> Female, age 36-40
> Utilities

And finally:

> It is because of frustration with upper management and lack of opportunity for professional growth and development that I will be in my current position just eight more days. I hope that I will be able to respond more optimistically to your next questionnaire.
> Male, age 46-50
> Medical/health care

Consider these responses in the light of the following findings, gathered from answers to other questions in this section of the questionnaire:

- When asked whether the changes they desired in their relationships with top management were likely to happen within the next five years, only one out of four answered "yes."
- Fifteen percent—less than one in six—strongly agreed that cooperation and communication would remain strong or improve during the 1980s. Over half felt it would decline.
- Only 18 percent had full confidence in their top managements' ability to lead their organizations in the decade ahead.

These figures must be taken seriously by top management. When only one out of five respondents express confidence in top management's leadership and less than one out of six expect anything better in communication and cooperation between middle and top management, something has gone wrong. Fortunately, the respondents attitudes toward other aspects of the future are not quite so bleak.

We asked respondents to classify themselves as "more optimistic than three years ago," "less

Exhibit 3.1. Improvements needed to allow a more satisfying, more productive job.

We asked our respondents to list improvements that they felt would contribute to greater job satisfaction in their present situations. We found a great deal of unanimity. The following are the major items selected and the percentages of the total group who chose them.

Better communication with upper management	33.6
Better communication in organization in general	27.6
Salaries, personnel policies, benefits	18.6
Participative management	16.2
Change in top management	16.2
Understanding and respect from upper management	15.7
Better short-term planning	15.2
More authority and freedom to act	14.3
More training and education	13.9
Automation, better tools to work with	11.7
Better strategic planning	11.2

optimistic than three years ago," "as optimistic as ever," or "I've never been optimistic."

Although we characterize our middle managers as a highly optimistic group, we also extend a number of cautionary judgments that may tend to mitigate this view. For one thing, *optimism among middle managers is mixed,* despite our overall conclusion. About 40 percent say they are as optimistic as ever. Thirty percent say that they are more optimistic than they were three years ago. But another 30 percent are less optimistic. Exhibit 3.2 compares the responses of men and women.

The percentage of managers who are "as optimistic as ever" remains consistently about the same across the age brackets. But there is a sharp decline with age in respondents who say they are "more optimistic than three years ago." This score begins dropping off considerably in the 41-45 age bracket. In general, the degree of optimism appears to begin a downward trend around the age of 30.

However, 35 percent of the women are more optimistic than three years ago, as against 27 percent of the men. Only 25 percent of the women are less optimistic than they were three years ago, against 31 percent of the men. Women managers, then, may be somewhat more optimistic than the men, in general.

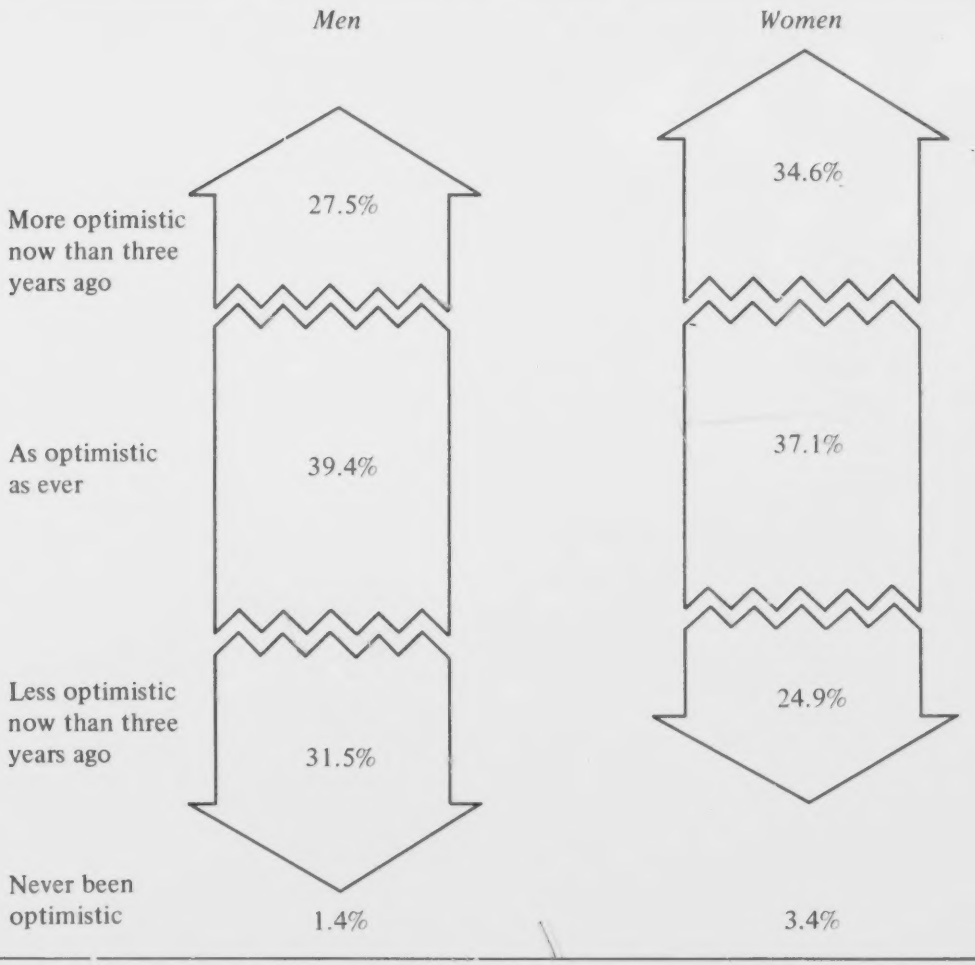
The strength of our middle management group—the 70 percent that is "as optimistic as ever" or "more optimistic than three years ago"—is the salient positive finding of this study. However, the mixed picture just described indicates that this optimism cannot be taken for granted. Hope often proves to be all too fragile in the face of unfavorable odds. Top management would do well to protect and cultivate this neglected source of potential strength.

We asked: "If you were to remain in your current job until the end of the 1980s, what would you expect your salary increases to be, relative to inflation?"

Salary expectations, relative to rising inflation, are summarized in Exhibit 3.3. Salary growth, although not a major concern for our respondents, indeed represents a consideration that influences prospects for the future. At present,

Exhibit 3.2. Optimism among women managers edges upward.

Respondents picked one of four statements to describe how they looked at the future.



the situation is positive: Recall (from Chapter 1) that 74 percent of the men reported they were getting a "fair" wage and 71 percent of the women felt the same.

As for the future, the following findings come to light:

- Half of the managers expect their salaries either to just keep up with inflation or to fall behind inflation if they remain in their present jobs throughout the 1980s.
- A booming 37 percent, however, expect to exceed inflation by one to 9 percent.
- A little over one-fourth of both the male and female respondents expect their salaries to fall behind the current rate of inflation if they remain in their current positions.

We asked: "What growth do you anticipate during the 1980s for the industry of which your organization is a part?"

Exhibit 3.3. Salary expectations vs. growing rate of inflation.

Respondents checked one of five boxes in answer to this question: "If you were to remain in your present job until the end of the 1980s, would you expect your salary increases to . . ."

	Total	*Male*	*Female*	*Supervisory Manager*	*Middle Manager*	*Executive Manager*
Fall behind current rate of inflation	26.3	26.9	27.4	32.3	27.6	20.6
Keep you even (in constant dollars) with inflation	23.7	22.1	30.4	24.7	25.4	18.8
Exceed rate of inflation by 1% to 9%	36.9	37.1	34.2	36.4	35.6	41.3
Exceed rate of inflation by 10% to 19%	9.5	10.4	5.5	4.5	8.8	13.1
Exceed current rate of inflation 20% and over	3.3	3.3	2.5	2.0	2.4	5.5
No answer	0.3	0.3			0.2	0.7

Over all, 45 percent expected that industry growth would parallel economic growth and 37.6 percent projected that the industry would grow faster than the economy. Only 15.8 percent predicted decline or stagnation. Cross-tabulations revealed these additional findings:

- Male managers are more optimistic about their industry's growth than are the women. Women tend to forecast a growth paralleling that of the economy.
- Respondents from state university graduate schools are somewhat more conservative in their projections than private university graduates: The state school respondents have a greater tendency to see the industry growth paralleling the economy. Those with private university backgrounds display a wider range of opinions, with comparatively more foreseeing both "greater growth" and "decline."

Finally, we asked respondents to use the 5-point scale to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements shown in Exhibit 3.4.

These insights emerge:

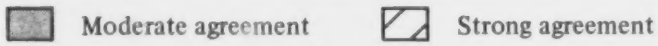
- Men, more than women, will accept a move to another city for a promotion. Moreover, the women do not expect their families to support such a move if offered.
- Half of the managers, both male and female, indicate that they expect one or more promotions during the decade ahead.
- Half also say that they are willing to make a career change if necessary to achieve a greater satisfaction with work.

The responses dealing with stronger communication and with confidence in top management's leadership ability have already been discussed. However, one closing comment is in order.

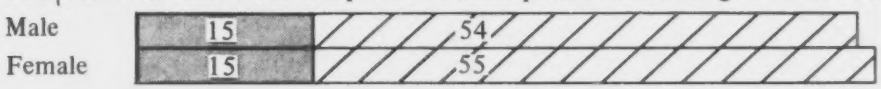
Our data was collected just as American business was emerging from one of the lengthiest reces-

Exhibit 3.4. A look at the future.

Respondents used the 1-5 scale to indicate agreement/disagreement with these statements. (The table shows the percentage agreeing and strongly agreeing with each statement.)



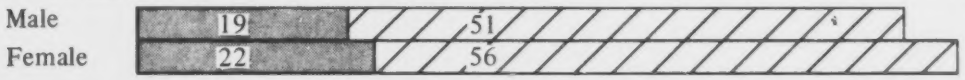
I am confident that I will accept one or more promotions during the decade ahead.



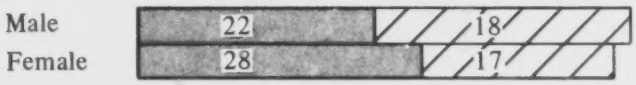
I would accept a move to another city as a condition for receiving a promotion.

My family would probably support my decision to move to another city.

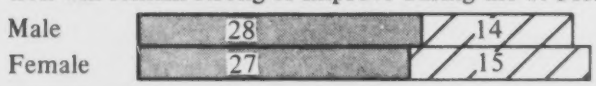
I am willing to make a career change, if necessary, to receive greater satisfaction in my work.



I have full confidence in top management's ability to lead my organization during the decade ahead.



Cooperation and communication between top management and middle management in my organization will remain strong or improve during the 1980s.



sions in history. Costs had been cut and some middle management positions had been eliminated. One is tempted to say that top management had become more concerned with its own problems—and with the problems of the blue collar group—than with the morale and productivity of the middle management group.

Now that the recovery is underway, the possibility of greater efficiency, greater understanding between top and middle management is within easier grasp. It's clear, however, that not much will be done to improve the situation without a determined effort on the part of corporate leaders.

4

THE EFFECT of AGE

Old age is the biggest surprise that happens to people.

—Henry Miller

The age of 40 is often said to be the time when some people begin to feel a certain desperation about their personal lives. The results of this survey, however, challenge the notion that people in their early 40s are the most susceptible to mid-life crises.

Can we pinpoint an age bracket where morale, sense of satisfaction with work, and hope for the future decline significantly? For the managers who participated in this survey, the years between 51 and 55 are a time of trouble.

No other group showed greater dissatisfaction in relationships with subordinates, peers, and superiors—or lower levels of confidence in top management's ability to lead their organizations in the years ahead. The percentage who said, "No, I am not successful in my job, considering my age," was greater here than for any other age group. And no other age group felt so strongly that "top management does *not* consult me in decisions that affect my work."

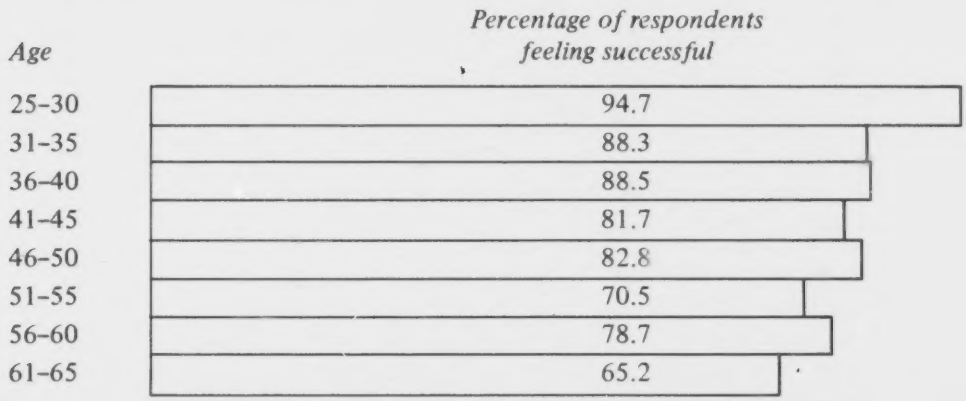
Perhaps that mid-life passage said to occur shortly after age 40 relates more to a manager's personal life. And so it may be that age 50 marks a turning point in attitudes toward the job. Whatever the case, the patterns clearly point to the need for anyone concerned with the quality of work life to become more sensitive to the changes in outlook that are likely to occur in middle managers who reach age 50. This need will become more pressing in the years ahead, as the sweeping changes in American age demographics push the "baby boom" generation closer to the half-century threshold.

Keep in mind, of course, that we did not conduct a longitudinal survey. That is, we did not select a single group of managers and track their progress over a 30- or 40-year timespan. Still, take a close look at these differences among age groups—not all of which were presented in the main body of the report. (For all questions requiring respondents to rate an item on a 1-to-5 scale, we will compare only those percentages who assigned the item a top rating.)

Question: Do you feel successful in your career, considering your age? The number answering "yes" falls off dramatically at age 51-55. The number answering "no" increases sharply at about the same age. See Exhibit 4.1.

Question: Please rate these items to indicate their relative importance in your personal definition of success. Apparently, the yardsticks used

Exhibit 4.1. Do you feel that you are successful in your career, considering your age?



to measure success change over the years. Here are some of the more significant gauges and a rundown of how they vary with age:

- ***Salary***. The percentage voting for this as an important indicator of success (a rating of 4 or 5) begins to drop at age 46-50 and continues to decline for respondents aged 50 and over.
- ***Decision-making responsibility***. The percentage giving this a high rating starts to drop off at age 50-55.
- ***Regular promotions***. This, too, seems to lose its importance as a manager grows older. The decline begins with respondents in the 46-50 age bracket and continues downward for those over 50.
- ***Changes in the company or department resulting from the manager's ideas***. This factor is clearly more important for respondents under age 40; after that, the percentage assigning top importance to the impact of their ideas at the job starts to drop off.
- ***Significant community activity***. Contrary to the patterns for other items, this is relatively unimportant for the younger respondents. At the age of 46-50, community activity begins to grow in importance.

For the other success indicators, including *feeling of financial security; respect from subordinates, peers, and supervisors;* and *opportunity for a happy home and social life,* there are no significant differences among the age groups.

Question: Now, tell us how successful you feel you have actually been in each of these areas. These differences stand out:

- ***Regular promotions***. Surprisingly, the tendency to rate actual achievement on this item as *less* than a 4 or 5 begins with respondents in the 31-35 age group. The downward trend continues for respondents over 35.
- ***Respect from superiors, peers, and subordinates***. Respondents in the 56-60 age bracket feel slightly less successful in this area; however, the feeling of actual success jumps upward during their last years of working life (respondents age 60 and over).
- ***Changes in company or department resulting from the manager's ideas***. "Actual success" in this area is most strongly felt among those in the 40-50 age bracket. After that, a downward trend occurs. Recall, however, that this item becomes less important as a gauge of success as a manager grows older.

- ***Happy home and social life.*** Achievement of this peaks at age 46-50, then declines slightly, then jumps up sharply after the age of 56.

Question: To what extent would new programs [in various areas] *improve your morale and job satisfaction?* The respondents, regardless of age, assigned consistently high ratings to several key programs. For example, managers are apparently interested in greater opportunity to participate in seminars and to upgrade their management or technical skills as long as they are working. In like manner, a rating scale for determining job grades and salary levels has clear morale-boosting potential for respondents of all ages. Differences among age groups *do* stand out in two areas, however:

- ***An effective performance appraisal system.*** Managers in the 46-50 category feel more strongly than do other groups that this innovation would improve morale.
- ***Better communication with immediate supervisors.*** The need for improvement here was felt most keenly by managers in the 51-55 age group.

Question: To what extent do the following [aspects of your organizational or social environment] *affect your morale and job satisfaction?* Analysis of these answers shows, quite clearly, that managers are more sensitive to ethical, economic, and political matters as they mature. The percentage who indicated that their organizations' ethical standards have a high effect on morale rises sharply at the 46-50 age bracket. There is, however, a steadily growing sensitivity to this principle from the 25-30 age group upward.

The U.S. economic climate seems to have an increasingly greater impact on morale after a manager reaches age 40. And confidence in the U.S. government has a steadily greater influence after age 50.

Question: To what extent do you agree with these statements [regarding relationships with others at the workplace]? Here, moreso than for any other question, the responses point to difficulties encountered between 51 and 55.

I am satisfied with my relationships with my peers. The lowest levels of satisfaction come at age 51-55; satisfaction then rises sharply through age 65.

I am satisfied with my relationships with my superiors. The same pattern occurs here: the satisfaction curve bottoms out at 51-55, then turns upward.

Upper management welcomes my participation in decisions that affect my work. Again, the same pattern.

Middle managers respect the honesty and straightforwardness of top management. The greatest disagreement with this statement comes from the 46-50 age group; after that, the percentage agreeing rises steeply.

I have confidence in upper management's ability to meet future challenges. Again, confidence reaches a low point at 51-55, then climbs.

Not all questions in the study produced sharp answers about the effect of age on attitudes and morale. But there is clearly enough evidence to show that a significant change occurs at (or around) the age of 50. Nor are these results peculiar to this survey. According to the AMA research staff, two other surveys conducted by AMA in recent years reveal strikingly similar patterns for those in the 51-55 group.

None of this should be surprising, of course. Many middle managers who reach 50 realize that, almost certainly, they will not be moved

upward into the top ranks. Moreover, they know that, except in unusual circumstances, salary increases will be at a percentage that parallels (but does not surpass) inflation. Some merit increases may be forthcoming, but for many (if not most), quantum jumps in affluence or influence are not in the cards.

If both middle and top managers know that a point of crisis occurs at this juncture in life, both may be mentally prepared to deal with it. A little extra personal attention from top management may go a long way. The nonfinancial benefits of the job may be improved—a refurbished office, more frequent opportunities to mix and talk with upper management, more attention to accomplishments in the company publications.

All too often, a manager characterized as an "eager 40" ages into an "increasingly resigned 50." We know from our survey that morale in this group is especially sensitive to communication with top management, to effective performance appraisals, to consultation on decisions that affect their work, to confidence in executive leadership, and the like. We know that members of this age group are as eager as anyone else for opportunity to upgrade their management and technical skills. And we know that community activities become increasingly more important as a measure of success. There is no substitute for the experience that long service brings. Older workers, our survey indicates, are not being given the opportunity to contribute their expertise and experience to the fullest extent. This is what they want, and this is what organizations should provide and profit from.

5

MEN and WOMEN*

Women managers, in many ways, see themselves as the forerunners in a new wave of female opportunity. Anxious to be more successful, they want to do their jobs well, and right, *now*. Our female respondents seem also to be examining their present positions more carefully than women may have in the past. Clearly, however, the women who responded to this survey are asking for help to do better.

While concentrating on their present work, the female respondents seem to see job satisfaction as depending less on such things as their companies' profitability, the state of the nation's economy, global strife, and family and personal factors than do the men. This does not mean that they are not interested in these things. Men, however, perhaps more confident of their abilities, can afford to spend time worrying about the national economy, family problems, world affairs, and other factors external to the job.

*A word about the comparisons between male and female managers: Bear in mind that we did not use a matched sample. In other words, we did not compare women with their precise male counterparts. The men and women may not have the same management experiences or positions; ages may vary, and educational and salary levels may differ. We feel, however, that our findings are representative in that company sizes, industries, and geographical regions reflect the larger picture.

Earlier in this study, we cited a few differences between men and women managers in job satisfaction, morale, and hope for the future. In this chapter, we will capsulize some of those findings for purposes of greater emphasis and further discussion of what might be done to ameliorate conditions where room for improvement is indicated.

RATINGS OF INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

When asked to rate the various "success indicators" as to their importance, the women responded differently from the men as follows:

High degree of decision-making responsibility. Women rate this factor of greater importance than do the men. Not a large difference, but one that is significant.

Respect from superiors, peers, and subordinates. Women rate this item higher than do the men by a somewhat larger degree.

Changes in company or department resulting from my ideas. Women give this a higher rating than men do, but not by a wide margin.

Opportunity for achieving a happy home and social life. Here the men give a significantly

higher rating of importance than do the women.

HOW NEW PROGRAMS AFFECT MORALE

The women gave higher importance ratings than the men to the following innovations in company structure:

Better communications with immediate supervisors. Here women gave a much higher rating than the men, although both cite this as the "top importance" item for improvement.

A pay scale comparable to that of other organizations in the industry. Women rate this higher in importance than do men by a comfortable margin.

An effective performance appraisal system. Women give this a much higher vote than men, rating it "very important."

A more complete and accurate information network among supervisors and subordinates. Here, women also give a "very high" rating as compared with men.

Greater opportunity to participate in seminars related to personal skill development. Again, women see this as much more important than do men.

Greater opportunity/encouragement to participate in seminars designed to upgrade communication on how the system works. Women are considerably more interested in this kind of program than are men.

An employee assistance program to help employees cope with personal problems. Neither sex views this as an important innovation, but women vote for it in larger numbers than do men.

A profit-sharing or gainsharing program in which you would participate. The women managers are considerably less interested in this option than are the men.

OTHER INFLUENCES ON MORALE

Factors ranked according to their influence on morale at work and job satisfaction also showed variations between the sexes. Note the following comparisons:

Company's profitability. Women, by a wide margin over men, do not consider their organizations' profitability as a strong influence on their morale and job satisfaction.

Political climate in the office. Women are much more affected by office politics.

Personal problems. Male managers show that they tend to "bring personal problems to the office" more than females do.

Enough time for family/personal interests. Here again, men score this factor much higher than women as one that influences job satisfaction and morale.

Confidence in the U.S. government. Men by a significant margin say that their morale and job satisfaction fluctuate with the state of the nation.

A job that allows you to use your best skills. Women rate this higher as a factor that is important to their morale and job satisfaction, although both sexes rank it as the number one influence on morale.

WORKPLACE RELATIONSHIPS

When asked to indicate how strongly they agreed with the following statements about their relationships on the job and the attitudes of middle managers toward top management, men and women balanced out as follows:

I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my subordinates. Women agree more strongly than men, but not by much. Both sexes are for the most part satisfied.

I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my peers. Men and women managers are about even here in being mostly satisfied.

I am highly satisfied with my relationships with my superiors. The women are slightly more satisfied with their relations with superiors than the men are, but not by a great margin.

Middle managers in my organization respect the honesty and straightforwardness of top management. Neither sex rates their top management very high on this statement, but women have considerably *less* respect than do the men.

These findings are enough to show significant variations in the job attitudes of men and women managers. We are not psychologists, but we feel qualified to comment on certain patterns that emerge from the data.

What comes into focus is a picture of women managers having a somewhat higher concentration on the job immediately at hand. They are asking themselves and their organizations how they can improve their skills and their positions. They want to be sure that they are receiving, for example, a fair salary, and that they are getting adequate information about the matters within the organization that concern them.

Overall, these responses suggest that many of the women feel that they are working in a kind of limbo. The lower level of education among women managers and their relative newness to positions of greater responsibility may make them feel less secure in their careers than their male counterparts. In favoring specific structural changes in their organizations—more effective performance appraisal systems, rating systems for determining job grades and salary levels, greater opportunity to participate in seminars to improve their technical and management skills—they seem also to be asking for fair and equal rewards based on equitable and objective criteria.

At present, evidence points to the need for more encouragement and greater opportunity for female managers. These are key signals to top management. If everyone needs at least some occasional assurance that he or she is doing a good job, women may need it a little more until they take their firm place in business and government positions.

6

THE FOURTH DIMENSION: PROJECTIONS and SUGGESTIONS

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.

—T.S. Eliot
Four Quartets

Middle management has often found itself truly in the "middle" in modern corporations. On top are men (and a few women) who tend to think of themselves as "professional managers." It often appears that these people would just as soon manage a bakery as a steel mill. And statistics on the buying and selling of companies, the "golden parachutes" that protect top management in mergers, seem to bear out the idea that top professional managers may increasingly be moving into a tight world of their own—a world that may have become somewhat removed from the actual products and services that the company was founded to furnish.

Blue collars, shielded perhaps by unions and feeling only a remote connection with top management, also live in a different world. Quality circles and "pep pieces" in company publications may increase productivity, but upper management and blue collar workers may still be worlds apart mentally and psychologically.

Middle management by its very nature leans sympathetically and wishfully toward upper management. Fairly satisfied with its salaries (as the survey showed), what it seems to want is emphasis on the *management* part of its title. It seems to want the opportunity to spread its wings, to be a real part of management in its own territory, and to feel that it is making a true contribution to the success of its company. It wants a feeling of personal dignity and worth in the eyes of both peers and superiors. It wants to be seen as respected and recognized members of the community—as persons.

It also wants an opportunity to respect and have faith in top management. If this respect and faith are in short supply, it is an educational job for top management to restore middle management confidence.

Top management may think that middle management is now getting these things, but our survey from many companies shows that there is a large degree of dissatisfaction. Something more needs to be done so that middle management can once more say it is proud to be where it is.

OLD-FASHIONED VIRTUES

Once, some 50 years ago, in a small Midwest city, there were two directly competitive manufacturing companies. They were, for reasons now obscure, directly across the street from each other. At noon, when all the office employees went home for lunch (a pleasant practice in small towns of those days), they almost instinctively walked on opposite sides of the street. Neither apparently wanted to associate with "them," it is said. It cannot be proved now, of course, but it is fairly certain that the top management of both companies did have some contact. Middle management and staff, however, still had an old-fashioned loyalty to their own companies.

Gone now—and a subject of some wonder and disblief for present-day business sophisticates.

Another company in another city could always count on a contingent of middle management and staff working on Saturday morning. Top management had never issued orders to this effect. There was no extra pay as a carrot nor any stick to goad the workers. But each person, when asked, would say that there was "some work that needed finishing up," and Saturday morning was the best time. Sports shirts replaced white shirts, but regular tasks of the week were addressed with enthusiasm.

Now the offices are vacant on Saturday. There may be work to be finished, but the task can wait until Monday (right after morning coffee and danish).

These two unrelated bits of business history illustrate the identification with employing companies that once existed in apparently greater measure than now.

According to William G. Ouchi's *Theory Z*, "Trust consists of the understanding that you and I share fundamentally compatible goals in the long run, and thus we have reason to trust one another." This kind of trust—the feeling that just as top management wants to foster conditions that allow its organization to flourish, it also wants to create a climate that encourages its employees to grow and do well—is a major component of corporate morale. The elements of trust, identification, and pride—each employee's pride in the organization and his or her place in it—give dimension to the corporate picture—they give it its vitality, or when missing, leave it flat and lifeless.

Yet it is just that feeling of trust that is absent from the composite picture we get of middle management morale in our survey. The loyalty and dedication that depend on this esprit de corps, our study shows, are in serious jeopardy.

The middle managers who responded to our survey are a well-educated lot. There were many M.B.A.s, even a surprising number of doctorates. It is very likely that such persons, properly motivated and encouraged, could be much more productive for their employers.

Is it possible that much of upper management is composed of aggressive, hard-driving people who have lost a basic capacity for understanding those who are not so aggressive? Is is difficult for an ambitious upper manager who has forged his or her way to the top truly to understand persons who have never had or may not have wanted the push to make it into top positions?

And yet, this understanding is exactly what middle management wants and needs. It appears that top management should seriously rethink its attitudes.

Some things are clear:

1. Middle management wants a "piece of the

action." It wants a feeling of being consulted and listened to, a feeling of being a part of policy decisions that affect, at least, its own sphere of interest.

2. It sounds old-fashioned in these modern times, but reading between the lines, we see a real desire on the part of middle management to have the opportunity to be genuinely loyal to its employers.
3. Middle management *wants* to have faith in the honesty, straightforwardness, and capability of its top management in the years ahead. This calls for education and contact by top management with the middle group.

Are these things possible? Of course they are. A change in habits and attitudes on the part of upper management can be accomplished without a loss of the authority these people want and need for themselves. Such a change in attitude on the part of upper management can take so many different forms that listing them becomes difficult. The most important change, however—without which no form of action can be useful—is a willingness to try to develop a true understanding of the humanness and worth of each member of middle management. Without a true dedication to this task, nothing else will do the trick.

Even a profusion of articles and pictures in employee publications will not accomplish the job if sincere understanding does not accompany the printed effort. Indeed, pictures, articles, awards, can do little for a middle manager who really desires to be a working partner of his or her employer.

Well, specifically, what can be done? Here are a few suggestions. They do not call for great movements or great revolutions in how a company runs itself. But they may work very well in creating a happier, better motivated middle management.

1. A series of meetings of small groups of middle managers with members of top management could be instituted. In these meetings, an almost "hair down" atmosphere could encourage top management to discuss its problems and show clear interest in suggestions from everyone present. Clearly not all company problems can be so publicly discussed, but there are areas where top management could well benefit from more input. Done sincerely and with finesse, such meetings could well win greater respect for management from its next in command. Under such circumstances, top management would not lose its own prerogatives.
2. Such meetings could utilize from time to time the services of top management people from such areas as finance, product development, marketing and sales, and so on.
3. Women managers, in particular, still require extra attention from top management. They need to be assured that they are being treated fairly and equally. Since the survey shows this need to be so strong, it is up to top management to make sure that women do understand that they *are* being treated just like other middle managers and are being given equal opportunities. And it goes without saying that top management must ensure that they are being so treated.
4. We have heard middle managers say that they have never met the presidents of their companies. Obviously, huge corporations would have difficulty arranging such meetings, but many smaller companies could make the president more available. And if not the president, we may say that the greater number of sympathetic and agreeable contacts that can be made between the levels of management, the better the morale (probably on both levels).
5. An occasional and unexpected word or note of praise for a job well done can encourage a glowing loyalty that is priceless.

6. An occasional and unexpected request for advice can make a middle manager feel, at least for the moment, that he or she is really part of the "team," that top management values his or her thinking and counsel.
7. Sometimes, an unexpected and unsought improvement in the attractiveness of the middle manager's workplace will tell him or her that the company appreciates the work being done. This would probably be most useful in the case of a middle manager getting older in his or her job.
8. Sometimes, a visit by a top manager to the middle manager's own office will help satisfy his or her need to feel a part of what is going on—a person whose counsel is important enough for a top manager to seek him or her out. A little matter, but one that we have seen sometimes to be very effective.

But behind all these relatively small actions remains the real need for top management to reassess its own attitudes toward middle management. Better morale among middle managers means greater productivity all around—into the eighties and beyond.

APPENDIX
PERSONAL BACKGROUND of RESPONDENTS

Exhibit A.1. Age.

	(Percent of all respondents)		
	Total	*Male*	*Female*
Under 25	0.5	0.5	1.3
25–30	9.8	8.9	19.0
31–35	22.9	22.9	27.8
36–40	22.1	24.8	17.3
41–45	16.7	17.5	11.0
46–50	12.1	10.7	11.8
51–55	8.4	7.7	8.0
56–60	4.9	4.3	3.8
61–65	1.5	1.7	0
No answer	0.5	0.3	0.4

Exhibit A.2. Where you spent most of your childhood and teenage years.

(Percent of all respondents)	
Type of community	
Urban	31.5
Suburban	42.1
Rural	18.1
No answer	8.3
Region	
Northeast	26.4
Middle Atlantic	10.2
Southeast	9.4
Midwest	30.2
Mountain States	2.5
Southwest	9.1
Northwest	1.7
Foreign	3.9

Exhibit A.3. Your area of work by function and position.

(Percent of all respondents) *Functional area of work*	
General management	22.7
Personnel	20.2
Management systems and science	10.4
Marketing	9.5
Finance	8.3
Manufacturing	7.0
Research and development	6.7
Purchasing	3.1
General services	2.2
Insurance	2.0
International management	0.9
Packaging	0.3
Miscellaneous	5.5
No answer	1.7
Position	
Supervisory manager	12.9
Middle manager	56.4
Executive manager*	28.4*
Miscellaneous and no answer	2.3

**Note:* Although mailings went to a list of people known to be middle managers, two discrepancies may arise: Some have been promoted since the list was compiled, or (and more likely) some persons may list themselves as general management even though they are more truly at the top of the middle management group.

Exhibit A.4. Classification that best describes your company.

(Percent of all respondents)	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*
Manufacturing (industrial)	28.5	31.6	12.7
Manufacturing (consumer)	15.1	14.7	13.5
Medical/Health care/ Nonprofit	11.3	9.8	22.4
Government	7.4	7.1	9.3
Finance/Real estate/ Insurance	6.9	6.1	13.1
Merchandising (wholesale/retail)	5.1	5.5	3.4
Service	4.6	4.0	6.3
Utilities	3.8	3.7	3.8
Communications/ Publishing	2.7	2.7	3.0
Education	2.4	2.2	3.8
Mining energy	2.3	2.5	0.8
Transportation/ Distribution	2.1	2.3	2.1
Engineering/ Construction	1.8	2.3	0.4
Consulting	1.5	1.7	0.8
Recreation/ Hospitality	1.2	1.1	1.7
Food/Agriculture	0.6	0.5	0.8
Other	2.3	2.0	2.1

Exhibit A.5. Number of people employed by your company at all locations.

Number	*Percentage of respondents reporting*
Fewer than 100	7.2
100–499	21.7
500–2,499	25.8
2,500–4,999	10.7
5,000–9,999	9.2
10,000 or more	25.2
No answer	0.2